

What can I do to begin the healing process?

There are some positive steps that you can take right away to begin healing. Here are some suggestions:

- Recognize your loss.
- Establish safety for yourself.
- Respect the way you feel and your right to feel that way.
- Talk about your feelings with those you trust.
- Connect with other survivors of violence, many of whom experience similar difficulties.
- Do not be afraid to seek professional help.
- Try to recognize triggers that may take you back to the memory and fear of your trauma.
- Try to be patient and avoid making rash decisions—it can take time to figure out where you are, where you want to be, and how to get there.
- Take care of yourself—exercise, eat right, and take a deep breath when you feel tense.
- Try to turn your negative experience into something positive—volunteer, donate, or do something else to constructively channel your energy and emotions.
- Do not abandon hope—believe that healing can and will take place.



Where can I go for help?

The healing process takes time, and many questions, hurdles and frustrations may surface along the way.

Contact Information

SAMHSA's Mental Health Services Locator

www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/databases

SAMHSA's National Mental Health Information Center

1-800-789-2647

1-866-889-2647 (tdd)

SAMHSA's Toll-Free Substance Abuse Treatment Referral Helpline

1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357)

SAMHSA's Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator

www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

Witness Justice

www.witnessjustice.org

Witness Justice provides an opportunity to connect with other survivors and experts from a wide range of professional fields as well as access to timely and pertinent information about trauma, mental health, and the healing and criminal justice processes.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Mental Health Services
www.samhsa.gov

Answers in the Aftermath



A guide to mental health concerns
for victims of violent crime

As a survivor of violent crime, you may face a wide range of emotional and physical struggles, along with some difficult questions that often surface: *Why did this happen to me? How will I ever heal from this? Why can't I connect with others the way I did before? When will I start to feel "normal" again?* While the answers may be different for each individual, there are some striking similarities in how trauma affects nearly all victims.

Understanding the nature and impact of violent trauma can be essential to the healing process. This brochure is intended as a guide to help you along the path to healing and to avoid some of the common pitfalls along the way.

What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?

PTSD is a mental health condition that can be caused by experiencing or observing virtually any kind of deep emotional trauma, especially one that is unexpected. Millions of people in the United States suffer from PTSD, resulting from many different types of trauma—from enduring years of domestic violence to a single violent attack that lasts but a few seconds. PTSD is characterized by both emotional and physical suffering; many afflicted by it find themselves unintentionally revisiting their trauma through flashbacks or nightmares. PTSD can make you feel isolated, disconnected, and “different” from other people—and it can even begin to affect the most routine activities of everyday life. PTSD is a potentially serious condition that should not be taken lightly.

Why is substance abuse common following a traumatic event?

Since violent trauma can bring about so many changes, questions, and uncertainties, many survivors turn to alcohol and illicit drugs in an attempt to get some relief from their almost round-the-clock emotional turmoil and suffering. Substance abuse and mental health problems often accompany violent trauma. All survivors of trauma manage their experiences in different ways. Substance abuse, however, is not only an ineffective tool in healing from trauma, but it also can present a host of additional problems that make the healing process even more difficult.

What can I do if I am experiencing PTSD or if substance abuse becomes a problem for me?

According to a recent study conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the most effective way to combat trauma, substance abuse, and mental health

problems is through an integrated, holistic approach, taking into account how each individual problem affects the others. To begin, it can help to share your experiences and concerns with a service provider (e.g. counselor, physician, victim witness coordinator) who can assist in developing a plan to address all of your struggles comprehensively.

Psychologists and counselors with experience treating trauma survivors can be very helpful in working through PTSD, and there are prescription drugs available to help ease PTSD symptoms.



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